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Management
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SPOTLIGHT

Strategic Planning for Today's Challenges

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Drafting a strategic plan is not a "one and done" deal. A strategic plan needs to be a dynamic document that reflects the changing needs of the district.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

for Today's Challenges

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The idea of developing and generating a comprehensive and cohesive set of actions to guide a complex operation goes back to ancient times. In ancient Greece, the *strategos*, or “general,” focused on developing a plan to position and maneuver the armed forces for advantage against their opponents.¹ For centuries, philosophers, merchants, generals, politicians, and academics have worked to create well-crafted approaches to help navigate a complex world in order to achieve success. Most people credit modern strategic planning to the Harvard Policy Model, introduced by Harvard Business School in the 1920s, which gave birth to the SWOT Analysis, the systematic assessment of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.² In the modern era, companies like Southwest Airlines have thrived for decades in a heavily regulated, unionized, and brutally competitive industry by implementing a clearly articulated strategy: Southwest, for example, provides point-to-point destination routes, operational excellence, and distinctively upbeat staff, all at a low fare, and has rabid fans to show for it. Today, virtually all organizations view strategic planning as essential to their ability to thrive and avoid being disrupted.





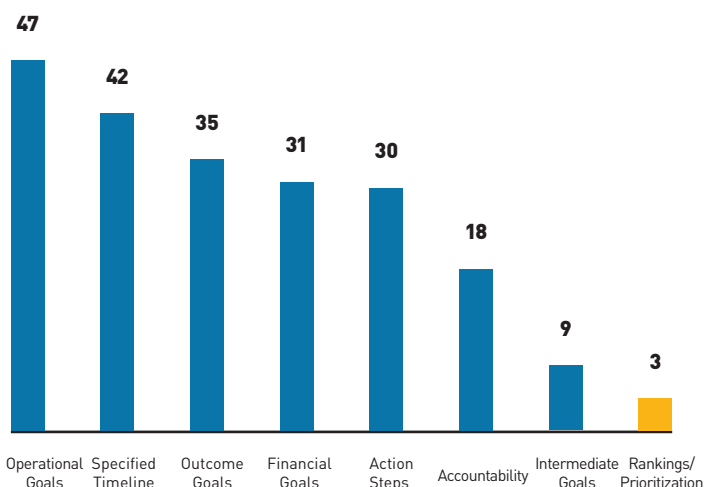
Strategic Planning in Districts Today

Almost all U.S. public school districts, regardless of size, geography, or demographics, have a strategic plan. Indeed, with districts facing rising expectations, mounting student needs, tightening budgets, and increasing regulation, strategic planning is more critical than ever to navigate these challenges amid the competing interests of a wide variety of stakeholders.

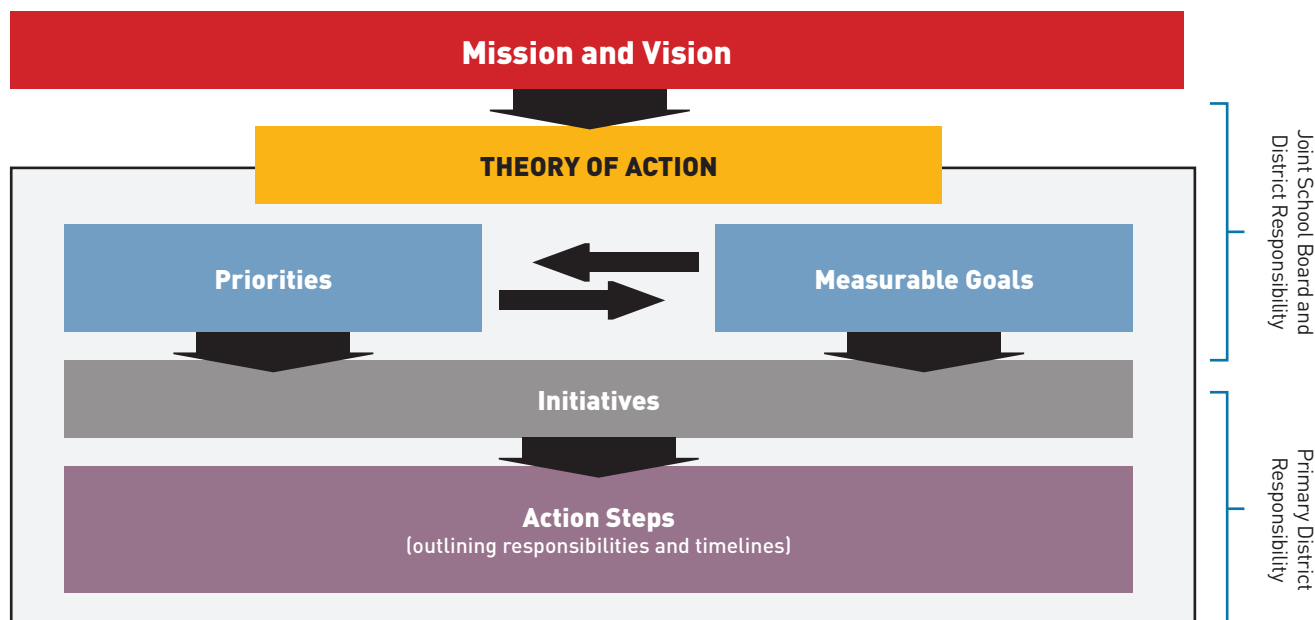
While almost all school districts have a strategic plan, a closer look reveals that the majority of these plans are likely not serving the function that they were designed to serve. Most districts' strategic plans have well-articulated vision and mission statements, yet lack prioritization of action or the measurement metrics that would turn these plans into useful operating guides. In many cases, they contain a very long list of initiatives and projects that satisfy the wish lists of the various stakeholders, but are too lengthy and too unfocused for any district to deliver on well. A few years ago, DMC conducted research on approximately 400 strategic plans around the country and found that, in fact, only 3% of the strategic plans contained any kind of prioritization or ranking of initiatives (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1 KEY ELEMENTS OF DISTRICT STRATEGIC PLANS

Percentage (%) Containing These Key Elements



Source: DMC study of approximately 400 strategic plans

Exhibit 2 DMC'S STRATEGIC PLANNING FRAMEWORK

DEFINITIONS

Mission and Vision: Long-term district aspirations

Theory of Action: Fundamental belief about what will lead to long-term success in the district

Priorities: Broad areas of focus to support the Theory of Action

Measurable Goals: Specific and measurable targets related to district Priorities

Initiatives: Specific projects related to Priorities that help to achieve the Measurable Goals

Action Steps: An articulation of what steps need to occur, by when, and by whom

Source: DMC

DMC believes that a powerful strategic plan articulates the overarching goal, but then distills this to a small set (e.g., five or six) of the most important levers that can be integrated and incorporated into all district activities to drive improvement.

This type of approach will

- Focus action on the most important levers for improving performance
- Align all district stakeholders on a clear path forward
- Guide allocation of the district's limited resources (financial, human capital, and others)
- Bring a greater degree of coherence between the district leadership and the governance body (school board)

To manage competing interests and accomplish all of this, DMC has developed a framework and approach that has been battle-tested over many years in districts of all sizes and across the country.

DMC's Strategic Planning Framework

DMC's Strategic Planning Framework is the result of deep research and refinements that have emanated from our work over the years helping many districts put powerful strategic plans into practice. DMC's framework connects a broad vision for the district with concrete goals and implementation tactics that are aligned and interconnected (Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 3 DMC'S STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS



Source: DMC

The framework begins by articulating a long-term vision and mission, something that many districts already have in place. With this vision and mission clearly in the forefront, the district must then define a Theory of Action (TOA) putting forth the core beliefs which will support the mission/vision and lead to the desired outcomes. Because the TOA is a foundational element, it envelops all components of the framework. Utilizing the TOA, the district next defines its Priorities—those areas of focus deemed critical to supporting the achievement of the district's long-term vision. These Priorities must be accompanied by Measurable Goals because it is critical that a district determine a way to measure progress from the outset. DMC's framework is distinctive in that it places Priorities and Measurable Goals at the forefront, which then connect to the implementation phase, where Initiatives and Action Steps turn aspirations into results.

The DMC framework is also distinctive in that it delineates the roles and responsibilities of the school board vis-à-vis the district team. School boards are ideally situated and organized to be actively involved in the articulation of the TOA, the Priorities, and the Measurable Goals. Defining the Initiatives and Action Steps, however, should be the provenance of the superintendent and his or her staff. Because the work is very fluid, creating some distinction in the roles provides greater focus and greater ownership. Taken together, these interconnected elements ensure a cohesive and actionable strategic plan.

Developing a Strategic Plan That's Up to the Challenge

Developing a strategic plan to meet today's challenges is a three-phase holistic process (Exhibit 3):

The Pre-work Phase provides the all-important foundation; it ensures the inclusion of an appropriate group of stakeholders, and provides a picture and diagnosis of the district's current state.

The Design Phase involves articulating the Theory of Action, the Priorities, and the accompanying Measurable Goals; this phase also includes engaging with internal and external stakeholders to ensure that the strategy is well-vetted and supported.

The Implementation Phase is the ongoing work of the superintendent and staff to delineate the Initiatives and Action Steps that the district will focus on each day to achieve the strategic plan.

Pre-work

Before launching an effort that will guide the district for the next several years, it is important to ensure that the appropriate people are involved and that there is an accurate and shared understanding of the district's current status.

1. Form a Steering Committee

DMC recommends that the district form a steering committee to lead the work of creating the strategic plan. The members of this committee should be expected to invest significant time

and effort into developing the plan. Also, the committee needs to function as a cohesive team that is seeking the best plan for the *entire* district, and not for a particular interest group. Committee membership needs to be broad enough to reflect the various interests of the district, but it is not meant to be a “representative” body with representation for every area. For example, the committee might have a secondary principal and an English teacher but not a math teacher; the expectation might be that the principal, having been a math teacher, can represent the strategic views of the math department. Finally, the committee needs to be able to work well together. By this, we do not mean that they will agree on everything. Our definition of working well together is that the committee be able to engage in constructive disagreements but also be able to arrive at a common understanding and decisions. Thus, thinking about the personalities and the potential behavioral roles that members can play is almost as important as the subject expertise that a person possesses.

DMC recommends a group size of approximately 10 to 12 members. This number is large enough to have significant representation, but small enough that it should be logistically possible to have full attendance at each meeting. Full engagement by every member of this committee is essential to the process.

2. Conduct Needs Assessment

A clear, accurate, and shared understanding of the current state of the district provides the foundation for a successful plan, and paves the way for a smoother planning process. With myriad opinions and theories on what the district could do differently, a common “fact base” grounded in rigorous research and analysis provides common understanding from which to launch the strategic planning process. There are three steps needed to conduct a needs assessment: (a) gather quantitative information, (b) obtain qualitative input, and (c) perform a root-cause analysis.

A. Gather Quantitative Information

As part of this analysis, the district should conduct a thorough review of data, including student academic performance, financial information, and operational performance such as teacher turnover data or survey answers. Ideally, districts should look at this information broken down by subgroups (e.g., by race, special education,

Exhibit 4 DATA FOR NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Quantitative Data

- District demographics (students and teachers)
- Student academic performance
- Student behavior
- College readiness
- District finances

Review multi-year trends. Compare to like districts and state. Analyze data across different ethnic and socio-economic student subgroups.

Source: DMC

Qualitative Data

- Interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders
- Key questions to include:*
- Things working well
 - Challenges requiring district attention
 - Initiatives for the district to invest in

Generate list of areas for further exploration and fact checking.

STRATEGIC PLANNING STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

An example from one district:

- Superintendent
- School board member
- Elementary school principal
- High school principal
- Teacher (President of the Teachers' Association)
- Director of Special Education
- Director of Teaching and Learning
- Program Supervisor, ELL Services
- Business Manager
- Head of Communications
- Parent

etc.) and over multiple years, looking for trends and outliers. In addition, it is important to calibrate as much of this data as possible through benchmarking. This helps to pinpoint areas in which the district may be excelling or to identify areas for particular focus.

B. Collect Qualitative Input Stakeholder Engagement, Part I

The quantitative analysis should be integrated with qualitative data that provides valuable input from stakeholders (Exhibit 4). During the needs assessment phase, DMC's model recommends conducting interviews and convening focus groups with key stakeholders. The goal is to ensure that their perspectives and insights can inform the discussions from the very beginning.

Drawing on years of experience, DMC has developed an approach to engaging internal and external stakeholders in the strategic planning process in a meaningful, productive manner. Successful strategic planning requires the input, vetting, and support of its stakeholders and its community. Indeed, in many communities, the school district is the largest budget line item for the town or city. Plans created in silos have limited potential for success, and yet, districts struggle to determine the most useful ways and the most appropriate junctures at which to engage stakeholders in the important work of contributing to the strategic plan. The most common approach is to engage groups at the very beginning of the process by holding a series of open meetings where stakeholders share their concerns and hopes as well as suggest potential ideas and solutions. After dozens of these meetings with different groups, the district typically ends up with a lengthy list of objectives. All too quickly, these types of strategic plans become overwhelming, with no one knowing quite where to start or where to focus. The alternative to this approach is to take all of the feedback from stakeholders and distill it into a focused plan. However, this approach also often proves problematic, as stakeholders whose feedback has been omitted can feel ignored and disenfranchised. Discontent brews, and interest and support for the new strategic plan vanishes.

For this reason, DMC has created a two-part community and stakeholder engagement strategy. During this needs assessment phase, stakeholders are engaged in order to capture their perspectives and insights from the very

The committee needs to function as a cohesive team that is seeking the best plan for the *entire* district, and not for a particular interest group.

beginning. The second phase of the stakeholder engagement strategy commences once a draft strategic plan is in place, which we will discuss in greater detail later.

C. Perform a Root-Cause Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative data highlight the “symptoms” and not the root cause of the issue at hand. Thus, it is important to work to identify the underlying causes. For example, in one district, the high school had a relatively high dropout rate despite considerable investments in support programs and interventions. By employing an iterative interrogative technique of the “5 Whys”—asking the question “Why?” repeatedly (five times or more)—DMC worked with the district to uncover the root cause of the problem. It was discovered that a significant proportion of students who



dropped out were getting “lost” in the district’s one large comprehensive high school. When these students first started having trouble, they were moved to a small dropout-prevention program; however, once they started to do better, they were placed back in the high school and soon thereafter would drop out. With a root cause correctly identified, the district could work to address the problem. Unearthing these root causes is an essential step to identifying priority areas that may need additional focus, and will help in the process of drafting a powerful strategic plan.

Design

3. Draft the Strategic Plan

There are three key components to a well-designed strategic plan: the Theory of Action, Priorities, and Measurable Goals. These three components need to be aligned to work well together.

A. Develop a Theory of Action

A well-articulated Theory of Action reflects the district’s core beliefs, provides a coherent guide for the work, and is easily understood by virtually all district stakeholders. Crafting a

Exhibit 5 EXAMPLE OF A DISTRICT'S STRATEGIC PLAN ELEMENTS

THEORY OF ACTION	<p>If resources are in the schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School communities have autonomy over resources and programming for students, and There is appropriate guidance, support, and accountability for results from the district office; <p>Then school communities will make improved decisions based on school needs, and student achievement will increase.</p>
Priorities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The district will allocate resources efficiently, equitably, and transparently to schools. The district will focus on literacy, particularly in early grades, to build a strong foundation for academic success across all subject areas. The district will empower schools to utilize appropriate strategies to reduce the achievement gap. The district will equip staff with knowledge and tools necessary to effectively engage with the families, partners, and community. The district will maintain a safe and respectful environment, and foster personal well-being and health among students and staff.

Examples of Measurable Goal, Initiative, and Action Steps associated with Priority #1

Measurable Goals	By 2020, 90% of school-based staff (principals and teachers) will indicate full knowledge of how resources are allocated among schools (in staff survey).
Initiatives	By November 2016, district will design a new methodology for allocating resources to schools, basing it on clear, consistent factors such as student needs, number of students, etc.
Action Steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data dept.: conduct diagnostic to identify perceived inequities in current resource allocation system. To be completed by June 30, 2016. Finance dept.: research resource allocation models in similar districts. To be completed by May 2016.

clear Theory of Action is challenging work; it requires various parts of the organization to come together to engage in authentic and courageous discussions about the core beliefs of the district, what is working well, what needs to change, and how the district intends to achieve its long-term vision and mission. In other words, the district must think deeply about the context needed to successfully address the root causes of the district's issues.

As a helpful illustration, we will use the strategic plan outlined in Exhibit 5 as an example for each step in the process. This district's Theory of Action is based on their belief that building leaders should be given a significant amount of decision-making authority over resources and programming combined with some guidance from the central office. (This approach, often referred to as "bounded or guided autonomy," would contrast with a TOA based on the belief that a district's central office must directly control instruction in order to increase student achievement.) DMC worked with this district to arrive at their TOA through a series of intense discussions taking into account the history, the context, and the goals of this school system. Initially, members of the strategic planning steering committee held a wider-ranging set of opinions and feelings about how much autonomy school leaders should be afforded, and whether it should be earned or given. In the end, given the fast-changing demographics and student needs of parts of the district, the steering committee felt that the system could not serve all students well without school leaders being able to exercise a greater level of decision making. Still, given the history of the district, the committee also decided that the central office needed to guide and bound some of the individual decisions about resource allocation.

B. Define District Priorities

Once the TOA is articulated, the next step in the process is to determine Priorities, a short list (five or six items) of broad thematic areas of focus that will propel the district to achieving its vision and mission. Using the example in Exhibit 5, this district initially identified four Priorities. The four Priorities included their efforts to allocate resources to schools, but also included academic priorities focused on early literacy and addressing the different achievement gaps—e.g., between white and Black students as well as among students from low socio-economic backgrounds. They also wanted to strengthen the school's and staff's ability to increase engagement with their community. It should be noted that identifying early literacy as a Priority does not mean math is

Combining lagging metrics with leading metrics to track performance allows for intermediate course correction.

unimportant; rather, this Priority signifies that the district will pay special attention to literacy. Taken together with the TOA, this Priority says that school leaders can determine how best to serve their communities, but the district will be providing guidance to focus on early literacy.

One of the common challenges with this step in the process is to get down to a short list of priorities from the lengthy number of items that a district may want to pursue. Often a district will have a laundry list of priorities that reflect the varied opinions and perceptions of the steering team members charged with drafting the plan. The committee needs to work together to rise above their ideological differences or, at the very least, to appreciate those differences, and then move on to select the handful of Priorities that align with the Theory of Action in order to help the district achieve its vision.

C. Identify Measurable Goals

With the Priorities now fully identified, the strategic planning committee must also develop Measurable Goals aligned with each Priority following the SMART paradigm (**S**pecific, **M**asurable, **A**ggressive yet **A**chievable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-bound). Establishing Measurable Goals at the outset is fundamental to the long-term success of any district's strategic plan. Given the large amount of data that is typically available in districts, DMC has developed a few guidelines that have eased the process of setting Measurable Goals:

- **Include both lagging and leading measures.** Lagging metrics look back and tell us how things have been in the past, e.g. four-year graduation rates, whereas leading metrics are predictive. Combining lagging metrics

Having a draft plan to share with stakeholders helps to ground the discussion and allows for thoughtful, insightful feedback.

with leading metrics to track performance allows for intermediate course correction. For instance, the number of students who fail Algebra 1 in grade 8 is a leading indicator of how graduation rates may look for the cohort, all things remaining equal. Therefore, tracking this indicator would prompt the district to take action before it is too late.

- **Minimize measures that track processes.** Completion of tasks does not necessarily lead to desired outcomes. For instance, designing and implementing a new resource allocation methodology by a certain date in itself will not lead to better performance. Thus, in the example given in Exhibit 5, the district set a more specific goal to have at least 90% of the staff be knowledgeable and confident in using the new resource allocation methodology by 2020.
- **Create several layers of Measurable Goals.** It is a good idea to create different layers of goals to be used by different stakeholders. For example, a set of measures can be designed to be shared with the broad public, other sets can be created for use by the board as part of a district “scorecard” (these are Measurable Goals drafted as part of the strategic plan), and still many other measurable goals will be used by members of the district in handling day-to-day operations. For the strategic plan, DMC believes that two or three key Measurable Goals are sufficient to measure progress for each Priority. An excessive number of Measurable Goals not only creates logistical challenges but may transmit inconsistent signals about the district’s progress. District staff will certainly have many more data points that are being used every day to chart progress.

4. Engage with Stakeholders Stakeholder Engagement, Part II

Before finalizing the strategic plan and moving into implementation, the district must engage various internal and external stakeholders again and seek their input and feedback to ensure that the plan reflects the wider community’s aspirations for the future.

A series of facilitated meetings with the various stakeholders (e.g., all principals, broader groups of teachers, noninstructional staff, parents, etc.) and community members, including community leaders, business owners, foundation heads, and residents without children in the system, should be held. Having a draft plan to share with stakeholders helps to ground the discussion and allows for thoughtful, insightful feedback. These meetings provide essential insight into different perspectives, can highlight details that may have been overlooked, and offer an opportunity for feedback and reaction.

This engagement process also helps to create broader understanding and buy-in. Hearing various reactions to the plan can help build some understanding among stakeholders and cultivate an appreciation for the complexities at hand. While it may not create consensus, the engagement process creates a deeper understanding of the needs of the district and some sense of the tradeoffs that the district often needs to make.

Here is an example of how community feedback worked to augment the original draft of a strategic plan. Having gone through the design phase with DMC, the district described in Exhibit 5 articulated four strategic Priorities which it presented to the community for feedback. During the stakeholder feedback phase, school safety and student health came up frequently as areas that the district should prioritize. Recent incidents of gun-related violence in schools nationwide and the increased incidence of childhood obesity were issues at the forefront of people’s minds. This specific and thoughtful feedback from the community sparked reflection, and in the end, a fifth priority was added: “The district will maintain a safe and respectful environment, and foster personal well-being and health among students and staff.”

At this point in the process, the school board should move to approve and adopt the plan. With the public portion of the strategic planning process complete, the critical work of developing concrete steps to put the strategic plan in action must begin.

The Implementation Plan

During this phase of the strategic planning process, the district needs to define the actions that need to take place, by what date, and by whom. This step is as important as the drafting of the plan itself. DMC believes that the implementation plan should be developed by more stakeholders than just the members of the steering committee; the group should be broadened to include many of those who will be charged with executing the plan.

5. Define Initiatives

The first step in this phase is to determine Initiatives, which are the specific projects related to each Priority. How many Initiatives should be included in the strategic plan? DMC was recently at a meeting of all 18 principals from a 15,000-student, K-12 district in Pennsylvania to discuss strategic planning. We started the meeting by asking two questions:

- How many major initiatives are you working on this year?
- How many major initiatives can you do well in any given year?

You can guess the reaction. There were a lot of chuckles and guffaws when we asked the first question. It is not unusual for principals to shout out “15,” “25,” or even “Who knows?” The reaction is virtually the same in every district—no one really knows how many major initiatives are underway, and whatever the number is, it is too many. Once the chuckles and sidelong glances subsided, we asked the second question. This time, we asked them to raise their hand for the number of initiatives that they can do well in any given year. We started with 18 hands in the air for tackling one initiative a year, but as we counted to two and then to three, most hands went down. One principal kept her hand up until “five” in this instance, but we have never had anyone in any district say they could tackle more than five well. DMC consistently finds that school districts are pursuing far too many projects, and

DMC consistently finds that school districts are pursuing far too many projects, and thus not doing most of them well.

thus not doing most of them well. Thus, like the process for determining Priorities, DMC’s process of defining Initiatives also involves creating a short list of high-impact work. Determining these high-impact Initiatives involves three steps:

• **Create a list of current school-system Initiatives:**

The “out with the old and in with the new” approach or the layering of additional programs on top of existing programs is ineffective. The best approach is to leverage and build upon the work already being done in the district and to create a coherent and aligned approach to moving the work forward. Districts should begin by taking the time to take stock of existing initiatives.



Drafting a strategic plan is not a “one and done” deal. A strategic plan needs to be a dynamic document that reflects the changing needs of the district.

- **Perform a gap analysis to identify future Initiatives:**

Once the existing Initiatives are aggregated, they need to be assessed in terms of their effectiveness and their alignment with the strategic plan. This process will expose gaps where additional Initiatives may be needed to achieve the strategic objectives.

- **Finalize a set of Initiatives aligned with Priorities:**

New Initiatives will then be formulated to address identified gaps. The final list of Initiatives is a combination of existing and newly formulated ones.

To return to the example in Exhibit 5, one of the key Initiatives developed by this district was the following: “By November 2016, the district will design a new resource allocation methodology for schools, basing it on clear, consistent factors such as student needs, number of students, etc.” This example illustrates its alignment with the TOA and the Priorities; in addition, it is specific about what needs to be accomplished and sets a specific timeframe to accomplish an important step in the strategic plan.

6. Identify Action Steps

For successful execution, each Initiative needs to have associated Action Steps that explain the following:

- What will occur, i.e. specific tasks that need to be performed
- How much, how often, or to what extent these actions will occur
- Who will carry out these tasks, including identifying specific school or central office staff members

- Which individuals will be required to provide feedback on interim work products, and who else will need to be informed as part of the process
- When will these actions take place and for how long
- What are the key milestones to achieve as part of the process
- What resources (if any) are needed to carry out the proposed tasks

Action Steps provide the details of what must occur, align all stakeholders in a common process, and enable all involved to think in a structured manner about the future of the work. In our district example in Exhibit 5, the Data and Finance departments’ Action Steps are as follows: (1) Data Department: conduct diagnostic to identify perceived inequities in current resource allocation system, to be completed by June 30, 2016; (2) Finance Department: research resource allocation models in similar districts, to be completed by May 2016.

By breaking down the overall strategy to this level of detail, the performance-monitoring system provides opportunities for mutual support, transparency about the progress made, and an accountability mechanism.

7. Manage and Report on Progress of Implementation

The success of a strategy is rarely defined by the strategy itself, but by the success in implementation; and, of course, successful implementation should result in improved outcomes. Follow-through on a strategic plan requires detailed planning and communication, analytics to track progress, and cultivation of leadership capacity at various levels of the organization. The implementation monitoring must be tailored to the needs of the district and take into account the strengths, weaknesses, and funding available. This sharpening of the link between tangible daily work and the overarching strategy gives stakeholders a holistic view that can enhance their motivation and understanding of the big picture. Very tangibly, implementation monitoring consists of the following:

- **Set up a monitoring system to regularly measure progress:** Districts should invest in a process—whether technology-aided dashboards or a simple Excel spreadsheet—to document and track progress on where the district stands vis à vis the defined action plans. The

monitoring system should include the baseline level of performance for each measurable goal, the desired level of performance, the timeframe, and the people with primary responsibility for achieving success.

- **Make time to review progress-monitoring information:** Key leadership staff must commit to monitoring progress on a regular basis and take appropriate steps if the data warrants. This involves a regular cadence of meetings (e.g., monthly) among the leadership team to review progress data. The board should also play a role in progress monitoring. This may involve reviewing the district's progress on the defined Measurable Goals quarterly or, at minimum, twice a year.
- **Assign specific individual(s) to gather and interpret data, track progress, keep teams informed, ensure that timely Action Steps are occurring, and adjust actions when necessary:** To ensure that the periodic progress-monitoring meetings are most effective, it is essential to charge one person with the responsibility of interpreting information from the monitoring tools. This individual will not just be a data aggregator but will also be responsible for identifying early warning signs, investigating performance issues with district teams, brainstorming steps for remediating situations where adequate progress has not occurred, and presenting this information to the leadership team for review and feedback. Upon receiving leadership feedback, this individual will then follow up with district teams under the leadership team's directive. The person in this role therefore needs a mix of project management and leadership skills, and is ultimately responsible for the successful, on-time and on-budget implementation of the strategic plan.

Conclusion

With districts confronting myriad challenges, competing priorities, and increasing student needs, the importance of a focused, cohesive, results-oriented district-wide strategic plan is greater than ever before.

Strategic planning is not an exercise in coming up with “out of the box” ideas; nor is it a required exercise to satisfy the school board and stakeholders. A district's strategic plan needs to articulate priorities, initiatives, and actions that will achieve the district's long-term vision while also ensuring the most effective allocation of the district's resources. A simple, clear, and coherent strategic plan is most powerful in guiding action throughout the district. Professor of management Donald Sull states, “For a strategy to influence action, it must be remembered. To be remembered, it must be understood. And to be understood, it must be simple. Keeping the complex simple (as opposed to simplistic!) is the key to the art of successful strategy.”³

Finally, drafting a strategic plan is not a “one and done” deal. A strategic plan needs to be a dynamic document that reflects the changing needs of the district. Effective strategic plan implementation requires periodic and honest assessments, and appropriate adjustments to the plan as needed. As the district environment and context change, the district should alter Priorities, Measurable Goals, Initiatives, and Action Steps to meet their new needs.

Your strategic plan needs to be up to the challenges of today. ♦



NOTES

¹. Nanang Bayuk, “Historical Background of Strategic Planning,” *Business* blog post (September 7, 2012), <http://culturalclassics.blogspot.com/2012/09/historical-background-of-strategic.html>.

². Ryszard Barnat, “Strategic Management: Formulation and Implementation,” *24xls.com* (2014), <http://www.introduction-to-management.24xls.com/en316>.

³. Stated by Donald Sull, professor at London Business School, while discussing successful business strategy in *Simplify Your Strategy*, a video from Harvard Business Review.